

Clearing

There is no longer any doubt that the atmosphere of Egyptian politics has begun little by little to clear, and that the dense clouds which for weeks have obscured the sky are gradually dispersing. The English removed part of those heavy clouds when they transferred their High Commissioner, and the Prime Minister attempted the day before yesterday to disperse another part of them. Before noon he did so timidly, and by evening openly and plainly. He spoke to Al-Ahram, affirming that his Ministry was stronger and more solid than it had ever been before—indeed stronger and firmer than at any previous moment. Yet scarcely had he finished these declarations before he mentioned the possibility of a ministerial reshuffle and hinted at possible change, since no government can remain forever in office. As the day advanced, the Prime Minister found within himself enough courage to speak more honestly to the public and reveal the reality of the situation. There is nothing surprising in this. The Prime Minister is now in France, where he hears the French repeat countless times each day their wise proverb: “The difficulty lies only in the first step.” The Prime Minister took that first step in speaking to Al-Ahram, exhausting the effort and strain required for it. The second step therefore became easier, and he took it that same evening in conversation with the writer of Al-Muqattam. There he hinted at resignation—or perhaps declared it openly. He explained that the person of the minister who bears the burdens of government matters little, while what truly matters is the policy and system itself, since circumstances such as illness may compel a minister to abandon office. Policy alone, he insisted, possesses lasting importance. The Prime Minister then affirmed that his policy would remain because it rested upon the confidence of Parliament. The meaning of this is clear: just as Sir Percy Loraine himself has ceased to matter in Egyptian politics, so too the person of the Prime Minister has ceased to matter. According to the Prime Minister, and according to certain Englishmen and Egyptians, only their policy remains unchanged and enduring. Let us record first of all that the High Commissioner has in fact been transferred, and that the Prime Minister himself now informs us that he will resign—if indeed he has not already resigned. Thus the two men who established the policy of this “happy era” have been compelled by circumstances, whose nature need not concern us now, to leave that policy to fate. This is no insignificant step toward clarifying Egypt’s political situation and resolving the crisis which has overshadowed the country for more than three years. However passionately the supporters of this “happy era,” English and Egyptian alike, may insist that the policy will remain unchanged, they are nevertheless forced to admit that this policy has lost its strongest support and firmest foundation once it lost both the Prime Minister and the former High Commissioner. And however strongly the supporters of this era may swear that Britain will not alter its policy, and that no aspect of that policy will be modified, they are nevertheless compelled to admit that time itself has already altered the policy profoundly by removing both Sidqi Pasha and Sir Percy Loraine from it. For policy is not an

independent thing capable of creating itself. It is the work of human beings, shaped by men according to their temperaments, their strengths and weaknesses, their inclination toward good or evil, their love of honesty or crookedness. Only God could provide this “happy era” with successors possessing precisely the same temperament, nature, and instincts as the Prime Minister and the High Commissioner. Therefore, whoever succeeds the Prime Minister and whoever succeeds the High Commissioner must inevitably influence policy in ways that differ—whether slightly or greatly—from the influence exercised by the resigning Prime Minister and the transferred High Commissioner. We are entirely certain that Sir Percy Loraine was not transferred because the British Foreign Office enjoys frivolity or delights in exchanging High Commissioners for amusement. He was transferred because the Foreign Office wanted him to accomplish a task which he failed to complete. Having judged him incapable of carrying it out, they sent him elsewhere where he might prove useful. We are equally certain that illness alone is not what has driven the Prime Minister toward resignation or thoughts of resignation. The Prime Minister has been ill for many months. His illness became so severe that it deprived him of the ability to work or even think clearly. Duty to himself and to his country demanded that he resign once he realized he could no longer bear the burdens of office. Yet he did not resign, nor even appear to consider resignation. Instead he devoted himself entirely to treatment and recovery. Most likely he spent this period hoping only to preserve his health. And now it is said that God has restored his health and granted him a considerable degree of recovery. Logically, then, one would expect him to cling more firmly than ever to office. Yet at the beginning of the day he informs us that his Ministry may be reshuffled, and by the end of the day he informs us that it may resign entirely. Public discussion now spreads widely that the Ministry has in fact already resigned. Let our reasoning be called crooked if others wish. Let supporters of the Ministry say what they like about our logic and judgment. Still, we cannot believe there is no connection between the transfer of the High Commissioner and the resignation—or contemplated resignation—of the Prime Minister. Nor can we believe that the simultaneous disappearance of these two men from Egyptian politics constitutes evidence, strong or weak, that Egyptian policy will remain unchanged after their departure. Such words may deceive children and the feeble-minded, but no rational person can believe or trust them. Thus the political atmosphere in Egypt has indeed begun to clear, and Egyptian politics has begun moving toward change. People now discuss that change endlessly, interpreting and analyzing it. Some tremble with fear while others burn with ambition; some hearts are filled with hopeful dreams while others are darkened by despair. Tongues have suddenly become eloquent with a brilliance rivaled only by those military strategists who devise grand plans of war in cafés and clubs over drinks, backgammon, and chessboards. Al-Ahram now publishes endless hypotheses and speculations. Some speak of a treaty whose draft has already been completed and which is to be signed before the two dear friends—Sidqi Pasha and Sir Percy Loraine—part ways. Others speak of a national ministry that will supervise

elections concerning the treaty between Egypt and Britain. Still others speak of this or that, or suggest that government is merely a means and not an end, and so forth throughout the endless commentary published this morning in Al-Ahram. Yet the one thing Al-Ahram did not say—the one truth it concealed from its readers—is that all these speculations and conversations are ultimately worthless. Not because British intentions remain hidden, nor because the intentions of those directing policy in Egypt are still unknown, but because the opinion of the Egyptian people has long been perfectly clear and unmistakable. That opinion has been clear ever since Sidqi Pasha and Sir Percy Loraine began this “happy era”—indeed even before it began. And this popular opinion has always been the primary cause of the failure of both Sidqi Pasha and Sir Percy Loraine. It will likewise remain the cause of failure for every policy resembling theirs and every minister who governs in their manner. The opinion clearly expressed by the Egyptian people is this: Egypt’s affairs can be decided by no one except Egypt itself. No foreign country has the right to decide Egypt’s destiny. Egypt alone must determine its own affairs according to its own will, not according to what others desire for it. The time has passed when civilized nations could be governed like children—sometimes by gentleness, sometimes by force, at times through deceit and at times through bluntness. That age is gone forever. Those who wish to negotiate with Egypt or conclude treaties with her must first restore to Egypt complete freedom in the management of her own affairs, so that she may negotiate freely and willingly, conclude treaties freely and willingly, and bear the responsibilities of negotiation and treaty openly, honestly, and sincerely. But secret negotiations conducted behind curtains, treaties slipped through in secrecy, or attempts to make acceptance of a treaty a condition for Egypt’s liberty and independence—these are things Egypt will never accept and never tolerate. Those who attempt such methods will succeed no better than Sidqi Pasha and Sir Percy Loraine themselves. The political situation has now become clear. The policy of this “happy era” has failed a disastrous failure, and there is no alternative but to abandon it. Egypt smiles at this failure while confidently awaiting what tomorrow will reveal. And Egypt declares firmly, proudly, and with dignity that every policy which does not begin by respecting her liberty and restoring her rights is destined inevitably for failure and ruin. Let those whose souls long for power and prepare themselves to leap toward office reflect carefully upon this. And let those who now mourn the loss of power and prepare to descend from office reflect upon it no less carefully.